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The Girl-Eyelist's Winning Hand



OR,

SCORCHER SAM'S
DEATH-HOLE DROP.

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CHAPTER I.

A RESCUE AND A TRICK.

With a few strides, Sam Buckley—Scorch-
er Sam—was upon the scene.

"What are you doing?" he demanded
sternly. "Release this lady instantly, or
the worse for you!"

SAM STRUCK THE FELLOW SQUARELY BETWEEN THE EYES, AND OVER HE WENT
LIKE A NINEPIN.

"Oh! Sir! Save me, save me from them!" cried the well-dressed young woman whom two men were forcibly detaining. "I do not know them!"

"Who are you?" the elder of the men demanded. "You had better go on about your business—"

"This is my business," said Sam, shortly. "What are—"

"It is none of your business! This young woman is my daughter, and I mean to—"

"That is false—false!" cried the lady. "I never saw him before in my life, sir!"

"And she is my wife," claimed the other.

"Oh, sir! He lies!"

"Remove your hands, instantly, both of you," Scorch Sam ordered in peremptive tone, and as he spoke he laid a hand upon a shoulder of each of the men with a grip that meant business.

The younger man did let go his hold, but only to aim a blow at Sam's face, and the Scorch Sam was forced to act promptly.

His left fist shot out straight from the shoulder, taking the fellow squarely between the eyes, and over he went like a ninepin. In the same moment the elder of the pair struck Sam a blow on the shoulder, and, wheeling half around, Sam gave him a dose with his right, and down he went, like the other. The young lady, thus released, ran swiftly away.

It was early evening. Sam was on his way, without his wheel, to keep an appointment, when turning the corner into a quiet street, a muffled scream caught his ear, and looking around he saw the scene described.

With a few strides he was on the spot, and proceeded to take a hand in the unequal contest.

"You shall smart for this!" cried the younger of the two men, as he essayed to rise.

"You shall die for it!" grated the other.

"You brought it all upon yourselves," retorted Sam, in his cool fashion. "If you had obeyed me I would have listened to both sides. You forced me to defend myself."

"And we'll do it again," hissed the younger man, furiously. "See! She has escaped us, now, and all your fault!"

"Steady!" commanded Sam, putting up his hands for business. "If you try it I will knock your two eyes into one the next crack. Here comes an officer; you can tell your troubles to him."

Several persons had now been drawn to the scene, and a policeman was running up.

"We'll fix you out all right for your smartness," threatened the older man.

"What's the matter here?" demanded the officer, as he ran up.

"This fellow has tried to rob us, that's what!" cried one of the pair. "We demand his arrest!"

"That's so! Arrest him!" supported the other.

The policeman laid a hand on Sam's collar and drew his club.

"What have you got to say about it?" from the officer.

"I ain't goin' to resist, so don't hit me. They's two ag'inst one, so what's the use?"

Both men looked at Sam in surprise, and then at each other.

What did this mean?

"You don't look like a footpad," said the officer, eyeing him sharply.

"Come, what have you got to say for yourself?"

"They have said it," Sam answered.

"But is it so?"

"I am goin' to plead not guilty."

"He doesn't look like a footpad, that is true," spoke the elder of the two. "Is it possible that we were mistaken?" turning to his companion.

"Don't see how we could be, when he tackled us the way he did," the other averred.

"Did he strike you?" asked the officer.

"Did he? Of course he did!"

"Then you have got a good case against him. Come on to the station with me—"

"No, no; we haven't time for that," the elder of the pair hastened to interrupt. "We can afford to let him go, so long as we have come off whole—"

"That won't do," assumed the officer. "You will have to come and make a charge, or I'll have to take all of you prisoners."

"But we have no time," urged the younger. "We have got to catch a boat, and—"

"Then it would be too bad to detain the gents, officer, don't ye think it would?" asked Sam. "As long as they don't want to press the charge, you needn't be kickin'."

"See here! You have got to come with me, the lot of you," declared the officer. The two men were in a quandary.

They could not understand Sam's sudden change of tactics, and evidently had no desire to make the close acquaintance of the police.

"No, no; we can't do it," they both urged. "It means a big loss of money to us, if we miss that boat. We don't want to resist you, officer," the older of the two added, "but we have got to be going."

"We will not make any charge, anyhow," avowed the younger.

"Let 'em go; that will suit me just as well," said Sam. "If they won't make any charge, what's the use luggin' them to the station?"

"That's right, young fellow," asserted the older man. "We would like to shove you for this, but time is money, so you can thank your lucky stars that we can't appear against you for it."

"Well, if you don't mean to make any charge, of course there is no use my taking ye in," the officer said. "Don't let me see any more of it, though," he added, turning to Sam.

"Not likely that ye will, this evenin'."

The two men were edging away now.

The Scorch Detective was satisfied of one thing, that they were up to some sort of rascality.

Now, however, he had reason to think otherwise.

"Come along with me," ordered the officer, pulling Sam by the arm. "I want to know more about you, my young gentleman."

"Oh, certainly officer, certainly."

"I am Sam Buckley, of the Bike Squad—Scorch Sam, as they call me."

"The deuce!"

"I had an object in letting those fellows go. I want to shadow them a little, and this was about the only way I could get a chance to do it. See, here is my badge; you don't have to take my bare word for it. Let them get a start, and then I'll go for them."

Briefly Sam explained what had happened, and, satisfied as to who he was, the officer let him go.

The two men were by that time far enough away for Sam's purpose, and he set out after them, having made a hasty change in his appearance while talking with the policeman.

CHAPTER II.

THE SCHEMER SHARPS.

The Scorch Sam had been on his way to keep an appointment with Bessie Blake, or "Bicycle Bess," his girl ally and assistant.

They had made an arrangement to attend a popular roof garden that evening, but now it looked as if that plan would be spoiled.

"Too bad," said Sam to himself, as he walked along, "and I will have to send word to Bess, somehow, if I find that I cannot keep the appointment. She will understand, when I tell her it is business, but that don't make the disappointment any the less."

The two men were walking at a brisk pace, and talking earnestly.

Feeling reasonably certain that his disguise would not be penetrated, Sam gained upon them.

If going to take a boat, they certainly were not going in a direction to lead to it.

Sam got up reasonably close to them, but, while he could hear their voices plainly, he was not able to distinguish what they said.

They were leading him in the very direction he had intended going.

"If they will only go on and pass the garden, and if Bess is waiting for me at the entrance, and I can catch her eye—they turn the right way, anyhow."

The elder of the shadowed pair was a man well on in years, with rusty-gray hair and whiskers and a nose remarkable for its length and the hook it had.

He was clad like a countryman, and though well enough dressed there was an air of the country clinging to him.

The other was much younger, maybe thirty years of age, and the style and cut of his garments proclaimed him to be city bred.

They continued on toward the roof garden.

What was Sam's surprise and gratification when, on reaching there, the pair turned in at the entrance and bought tickets.

Here was a bit of luck, indeed!

Sam looked eagerly around for Bessie, but she was not there, so he stepped aside and waited for her.

While he waited he removed his disguise, so that she would readily recognize him.

In a few minutes she came tripping along as chipper and sprightly as usual, and at sight of Sam a smile lighted her face.

"Right on time, I see," she said.

"Yes, by good luck. Was afraid I would disappoint you."

"That would not have been well for you, now I tell you."

"I am mighty well aware of that, and that was what troubled me. I would not have missed meeting you for a good deal."

"What was going to upset our plans?"

"A case."

"Oh-ho! Well, I could have forgiven you, in that event—that is to say, I would if you had invited me into it with you."

"Well, the case is still on, and I do invite you into it with me. I have got my men cornered on the roof, and we must manage to get seats near them somehow."

"Good enough! Maybe we can combine business with pleasure."

Sam purchased tickets, and they ascended to the roof.

On the way up Sam managed to put on a false mustache that fitted to his lip with springs.

They found the garden well filled, but not crowded.

Sam swept the place with his keen eyes looking for his suspects and quickly discovered them.

Leading the way, he and Bess managed to secure seats immediately behind them.

Some vaudeville business was going on at the time on the stage, calling forth applause, so the two men did not notice the newcomers.

Both men were watching the stage, and the elder seemed to be much interested.

As the performers retired, the younger man turned to his companion, saying:

"Well, Whitledge, made up your mind?"

"I told you what I would do."

They spoke in low tones, but keen and attentive ears caught their words.

"And I told you you would have to do more than that. You have got to put the girl into my hands again."

"I tell you I can't do it."

"You have got to."

"Be reasonable, Parmer. I have got myself in trouble, as it is, for she will know that I had a hand in it."

"That is just it; now that you are in the puddle with one leg you might just as well jump in and go the whole thing. It can be done if you will aid me."

"Haven't I done all I agreed to do?"

"Well, yes, but no one thought it would turn out like this. Confound that fellow who interfered!"

"That's what I say, too; confound him! Only for him you would have had the girl and I would have had my papers. While, as it is—"

"As it is, I still hold the papers, Albert Whitledge, and unless you come to my terms I will push you to the wall. I give you fair warning. I mean what I say."

"You mean to ruin me?"

"No, you seem more inclined to ruin yourself. Do my bidding and you will come out of it whole."

"What is your plan?"

"Well, as you have now played the girl false of course she will take no further stock in any tale you tell her."

"That's just it; I can't exert a cent's worth of influence over her now. What's more, it will be strange if she don't make it hot for me when she gets home."

"I don't believe she can do it."

"Why not?"

"Because of your high and honorable standing there. You can turn the tables upon her and say that she is willful and that you were only exercising your authority as her guardian."

"All that is easy to say, but—"

"No but about it. You can run things to suit yourself up there at Podunkville. You are a veritable Poo-bah in your town."

"Well, well; no matter about that. What is your scheme?"

"It is this: Since we cannot use your good name again, with effect, we must use the name of that lover of hers, John Lineman, hang him!"

"Ha! That is a thought."

"And a good one, too. If she gets a call from him she will obey it, not a doubt of it."

"Not a doubt at all. Now that is some thin' worth considering, my boy. Maybe it is not all up in smoke, after all. If I can bring it about I'll do it."

"I thought you would, for consideration."

"Yes, for consideration. The hour that you marry Estelle Whitledge you are to hand over those papers to me."

"That is the bargain! I thought you would reconsider your refusal to aid me further, under the circumstances. Here, here is something on that will please you."

CHAPTER III.

AN ARREST.

The Scorchers and his aide gave each other a significant glance.

It had been Sam's idea from the first that the young woman he had rescued was the victim of some scheme of no small magnitude.

Touching Bess on the arm, they rose and walked to another part of the garden, where there were tables for refreshments.

Here they sat down, and Sam called for soda-ices.

"Now, what do you think of that?" he asked.

"You have started game, sure enough."

"And now I will tell you the first act, which you missed."

Briefly he related what had transpired.

"Sam, we must balk their plans," said Bessie, with determination.

"Of course we must, but just now we have got hold of the thing in the middle, you see."

"Which is a good place for a strong grip, usually. What is the programme, think you?"

"I think I will follow these gentlemen further, and make the acquaintance of one or both of them."

"Which leaves me out in the cold."

"If you could find the young woman and warn her of her danger, or get on to her side of the case—that would be a lift."

"Just so. They mentioned Podunkville. Do you suppose that she will return there at once?"

"Wasn't that the drift of what we heard?"

"I guess you are right. What say you, Sam, to my going out there to-night?"

"Not to-night; to-morrow will be time enough. Then I will know where to reach you."

"Hist! Look there, Sam! It is Phil Bogle."

"The mischief!"

Scorchers Sam looked, and his hand went to his pocket.

Here was a man for whom he had been looking for days, a badly wanted man, and now was his opportunity.

"Take care of yourself, little one!" he said to Bess. "This is a chance that must not be missed. Look out for yourself if there is a scrimmage in landing him."

Sam arose and took a pair of handcuffs from his pocket, using care not to draw attention.

With these in hand, partly concealed by his sleeve, he sauntered over to where stood the wanted man.

Bogle was a big fellow, of powerful build, and it looked as if Sam would have the scrimmage he anticipated. But the detective was sure of his game. He had never yet seen the crook he hesitated to arrest, and did not hesitate now.

Approaching the fellow he laid a hand on his shoulder.

"I want you!" in low tone. Sam was willing to give the man a chance of going quietly if he would take it.

"You want me? What do you want with me?"

"A word with you in private."

"But I don't know you, sir."

"I know you; so come with me."

"Who are you—whom do you take me to be? Remove your hand from my shoulder instantly!"

"You are Phil Bogle—"

"You are a liar!"

The latter was loud enough to draw general attention, and men leaped to their feet in every direction.

The suspect had thrown Sam's hand

from his shoulder, and now stood on the defensive, but Sam did not desist.

"I say you are Phil Bogle, and you are my prisoner!" and again he clapped his hand on the man's shoulder, and put it there to stay.

Bogle instantly aimed a blow at the detective's face, but with his left arm Sam parried it, at the same time jerking the man half around with his right; then dropping his hold of the shoulder he caught one of Bogle's wrists with a quick motion and snapped one ring of the handcuffs to it, the other being fast around his own. In his other hand was a pistol.

"I am a police officer!" he announced.

"This man is my prisoner!"

"You shall not take me! This is all a mistake—an outrage! I call on any one here who happens to know me to speak up and say who I am."

He had started to struggle, but the steel on his bare wrist did not feel pleasant, and the proximity of the pistol was evidently less so, so he for the moment subsided.

"What is your name?" was asked.

"My name is Howard Newman."

"I know that man!"

The Scorchers looked, and to his surprise he saw the fellow Parmer, one of the two with whom he had had the melee on the street, pushing his way to the front.

"Am I not Howard Newman?" demanded the prisoner.

It was a clever way of making known the name he had already mentioned.

"Of course you are Howard Newman, a respectable merchant. What infernal blockhead business is this? Officer, you are mistaken!"

"No mistake about it," from Sam. "Gentlemen, make room, if you please."

"But I know the man," insisted Parmer.

"Yes, and I know you, Mr. Parmer, rejoined Sam, "and you had better say little or you may get into trouble yourself."

At mention of his name the fellow paled.

The managers of the place now made their appearance.

One of these demanded to see Sam's badge, and it being shown he was given assistance in removing his prisoner from the place and quiet was speedily restored.

Bicycle Bess had been close at hand, and her face flushed proudly as she saw Sam carry off his burly prisoner.

When he had gone she gave her attention to the man who had attempted to interfere.

Whitledge had now joined him.

"What is it all about, Elbridge?" he inquired.

"A big mistake, that's what it is," stormed Parmer. "If that fellow don't lose his position for this night's work, I miss my guess."

"Then you know him?"

"Know him? Of course I know him. One of the most reputable merchants in town."

Nevertheless, after what the officer had said in the hearing of all Mr. Parmer showed an inclination to cut short his stay and Mr. Whitledge followed him.

Bicycle Bess had put down her veil and followed them out, being able to get in the same elevator car with them.

They three were the only ones in the car.

"Where do you stop to-night?" Parmer asked of his companion.

"Well, gen'ly at the Astor, when I'm in town; 'bout the only place I know."

"Then I will put you on your car and take leave of you, for I have an important matter of business to attend to—something that had nearly slipped my mind."

"So have I," thought Bicycle Bess, now well assured that Parmer and Bogle were well known to each other.

She believed that the "business" Parmer had on hand was something in connection with the arrest, and so she meant to keep him in sight awhile.

"Well, if that's the case, of course I won't trouble you with my company any longer," said Whittledge.

"When do you go home?"

"To-morrow morning, of course."

"Well, remember our agreement. I will send the telegram so that it will reach there before the train leaves—say about 10 o'clock—and the party will no doubt come right out."

"Not a doubt of it, I guess. I will follow along on the next train and we'll finish up our little business."

"Yes, that's right."

CHAPTER IV.

A PRISONER NOT A PRISONER.

Meantime the Scorchers were hurrying his prisoner away to the nearest station, quite elated over his success, for Bogle was known as a desperate character.

There was a big price on his head, and there was a good prospect of twenty years' imprisonment ahead of him.

"You will regret this before you are much older, my fine fellow," growled the prisoner.

"Don't know why I should," answered Sam. "You are wanted, and it was my business to take you if I could."

"All the same you will regret it. You may think you have done a big thing, but you'll see."

"Well, that remains to be seen."

The prisoner muttered something under his breath.

Sam was taking a risk in conducting his man to the station alone and single-handed.

As he was armed, however, and had the man ironed to his wrist, he had never a thought but that he would accomplish it all right.

He was just turning the corner nearest the station, when three men sprang upon him.

The Scorchers' pistol came out like a flash, but he was not soon enough, for strong hands seized his arm and rendered him powerless to use it.

At the same time, he received a blow on the side of his head that made him reel, even before he had a chance to cry out for help, and a hand was clasped over his mouth.

While this was being accomplished by two of the men, the third was busy at the handcuffs.

He had a tool of some kind in hand, the end of which he was inserting into the link that held the two parts of the "darbies" together.

That was quickly done; he gave two or three turns with the instrument, there was a sharp snap, and Phil Bogle was freed.

One-half of the handcuffs was left on a wrist of each.

"Have ye got him, Turk?" asked one of the two who were holding Sam.

"Bet your sweet life I have! Lay that feller out now, Wood, and we'll git out of here."

"Don't kill him!" interposed Bogle. "Maybe one of you may get nabbed before you all get away. I told him he would soon regret putting his finger into my pie."

"And you bet he will, too."

One of the rascals now dealt Sam another blow on the head, and the detective reeled and fell to the sidewalk. Then the men all ran away, each in a different direction, just as the attention of passersby was being attracted.

No "cop" was in sight.

A man stopped where Sam lay and bent over him. Others were soon on the scene, among them two policemen, by whom Sam was taken up and borne to the station.

The scoundrels had made good their escape, there was not a witness to be found—witnesses are hard to secure where the law is such that the witness fares worse than the culprit—and the whole matter was a mystery to the police at the station.

In a little while, however, the Scorchers came to his senses.

At first he was a little dazed, but all soon came back to him and he inquired:

"Did he get away?"

"Who get away?" asked the sergeant.

"Phil Bogle. I had him dead to rights, and almost here."

"Whew! You don't mean to say you had Bogle, the forger?"

"That's what I do mean to say."

"Too bad you couldn't have landed him then. But who took him away from you?"

"That's what I don't know. There were three of them, and they went for me before I had a chance to get in a shot."

"Must have seen you make the arrest, no doubt."

"Yes, or else were near at hand and some pal of Bogle's got the word to them."

"And you didn't recognize one of them?"

"I heard one called Reddy, and as he was a big fellow, I took him to be Reddy the 'Turk'."

"Ha! We'll look him up immediately, and if we get hold of him we will make him tell who the others were or know the reason. But here! You must have that head bandaged."

Sam was bleeding freely, and a surgeon was summoned.

It was an hour before Sam left the station, and he wore a plaster on his scalp just over his right eye.

He went home at once, where he removed his blood-stained clothes and took a bath, and by that time he was about recovered from the effects of his rough usage.

He was running the matter over in his mind, while thus employed. He recalled the fact that Elbridge Parmer had been quick to speak up for Bogle at the time of the arrest.

That the two men were known to each other was apparent. Then, if it was Reddy the "Turk" who had rescued the prisoner, perhaps Parmer was the one who had posted him. If so, Parmer must be one of a clique of the worst rascals in all New York.

Bogle had been wanted for a long time, Reddy the "Turk" likewise, and both had been in hiding until just now.

After this adventure they would no doubt be doubly wary about showing themselves.

Scorchers Sam's mind went back to the young woman he had rescued that evening.

There was his clew!

The Scorchers quickly donned his wheeling attire, lighted the lamp of his bicycle, and left the house and rode quickly to the house where Bicycle Bess lodged.

Standing his wheel at the curb, he ran up the steps and rang the bell. The door was quickly opened, for the servant knew him. It was not the first time by many that he had called there.

"Is Miss Blake in?" he asked her.

"I will see, sir."

She was gone but a minute.

"No, sir; she is not in her room."

"Has she been in since eight o'clock?"

"No, sir; not that I know of."

Then she had not been home since he had seen her, and Sam paused a moment to think.

She had spoken about going out to Podunkville that night and perhaps she had started for there straight from the roof garden.

But she had intended taking her wheel.

"Will you see if her bicycle is in the house?" Sam requested.

"Yes, it is, sir; I saw it in her room just now, sir."

"Ah! then she will return home. Can you give her a verbal message for me, my girl?"

"Yes, sir; certainly."

"Tell her that I start for Podunkville at once. Tell her I desire nothing to be put in Miss Whittledge's way—remember the name. She will understand what I mean."

"All right, sir."

Sam mounted and rode in the direction of the ferry. There he learned that the last train out for Podunkville would leave in about an hour.

Securing his ticket and a time table, he crossed the ferry, and was studying the time table when a light hand was laid on his shoulder.

Looking around quickly, he exclaimed:

"Bess!"

She smiled as she answered:

"Always on hand, you see, Sam. Thought I would go out with you and see you through."

She was in her nobby bicycle attire and had her wheel, proof that she had been home and had thus received his message.

"And glad to have you. In fact, if I could have found you I believe I would have asked you to go out alone and get onto the game for me. You could telegraph."

"You want me to do that?"

"I see it would disappoint you. No, we will go together, and enjoy the run in the morning, if time and circumstances permit."

"That is better—a good deal. We will get out there in time to get rooms at the hotel, no doubt. But, what's the reason you don't want Miss Whittledge warned?"

"I have got to use her as a decoy to get on track of Bogle—"

"Bogle!"

"He got away from me."

"Oh, Sam!"

"That is to say, he was taken away from me. See that neat plaster there on my head?"

He told her all the circumstances, and her chagrin was almost as great as his own had been, to think that their man had escaped.

They talked on, while they waited for the train, and while they were thus engaged one of two men pointed them out slyly to his companion, who gave something of a start on seeing Scorchers Sam there.

These men got quickly out of sight until the train was about ready to start, after Sam and Bess had taken their seats in a car. And the last passenger to get aboard, just as the train was starting, was—Miss Whittledge!

CHAPTER V.

BESS PLAYS A LONE HAND.

When Bess and Sam parted at the roof garden, Sam to take his prisoner to the station, Bess set out to "pipe" Elbridge Parmer, as shown.

On leaving the elevator when it reached the ground, Parmer hurried Mr. Whitley to a car, and taking hasty leave of him, hastened off in another direction.

Bess found no difficulty in keeping pace with him.

He did not turn around, having no suspicion that he was shadowed.

Continuing for several blocks, he was ere long in a part of the town none too reputable.

Here he entered a saloon.

Bess, of course, did not care to follow into such a place.

She waited a considerable time on the opposite side of the street, but Parmer remained so long that she at last grew weary of waiting and decided to give it up.

She was about turning away to retrace her steps and go home, when two men blocked her way.

"Don't be in a hurry," said one of them.

"It won't take you long to stop awhile," leered the other.

Bess drew herself up with dignity, and her hand sought her pocket for her little protector.

"Step aside and let me pass at once!" she calmly ordered.

Instead of doing that, they laughed in her face.

"Come off!" sneered the one who had spoken first. "Mebby ye think we don't know ye?"

"You certainly do not know me. I bid you get out of my way, you ruffians!"

"Ha, ha! How is that for names, Ben?"

"Rather rough on us, Wood, that's the fact, but we don't keer fer that, do we?"

"You bet!"

"Are you going to let me pass?"

Bess now spoke loudly, and in a way that meant business.

She had cast a quick glance in both directions, and seeing no one, knew that she would have to defend herself.

"Hang it, but you are spunky!" cried the one called Wood. "Give us a kiss apiece, and we'll call it even and let ye go on; hey, Ben?"

"That's what we will."

"I will give you this if you don't get out of my way instantly!"

She flashed her pistol from her dress pocket, and taking a step backward as she did so, leveled it at them.

"Ginger fizz!" cried the one called Wood. "Loaded!"

"Mind your eye!" exclaimed Ben, dodging. "Put that thing up, gal!"

"Get out of the way and let me pass, or I will use it and use it to a purpose."

They saw that she meant it, and both leaped back.

Bess darted between them, and was quickly out of their reach.

She had not neglected to look back over her shoulder, however, to see if they pursued, and finding they did not, she slackened her pace to a walk.

The two fellows stood gazing after her for a moment, and then with shakes of the head went on, crossed the street, and entered the saloon.

Seeing this, Bess stopped.

An idea had popped into her head on the instant.

She retraced her steps, and approached the entrance to the place.

Nothing could be seen of the interior by means of the windows, and double

swinging doors likewise shut off the view in that direction.

There was nothing for her to do but push the doors ajar and peer in between them, if she wanted to see.

Slipping quickly through the first doors, she pressed the second pair slightly open and looked in.

Fortune favored her. Almost the first man she caught sight of was Elbridge Parmer, and at the same table with him were the two men who had just given her such an unpleasant encounter.

That was all she wanted, and she turned quickly to slip out again, when the doors were pushed suddenly open, one of them striking her.

"Ha! Beg pardon!" said a voice quickly.

Bess bowed and would have hastened away, but the man stepped out as quickly and was at her side.

"What were you doing there?" he asked her.

"I—I was looking for my husband, sir," she fibbed to him, in order to get rid of him as quickly as possible.

She glanced at him as she spoke, and found that he was a young man, mayhap thirty years of age, certainly no more, and that he was of rather prepossessing appearance.

Bess had her veil over her face.

"Shall I inquire for him for you?" the young man asked, stopping and at the same time lifting his hat.

This act of courtesy somewhat took Bess by surprise, for she had not expected it.

She hated to cheat the young fellow, but here was a chance to get rid of his company easily.

"Would you be so kind?" she asked.

"I will do it with pleasure," he assured her. "What is your husband's name?"

A name had to be invented instantly, but Bicycle Bess was equal to such an emergency as that.

"Ask for George Barret," she said.

"I will do so."

The stranger hastened away, and the moment he disappeared Bess ran off and was around the corner in a moment.

She made no stop, but went straight home, where she received the message left for her by Sam.

All of which she had explained as they waited for the starting of the train.

When they had taken their seats in the car, two men in the seat just ahead of them opened a conversation.

"So you are going out home, John?" one queried.

"Yes, my mother is not very well, and I thought I would run out and see her."

"Don't see how the city editor could let you off. I have heard it is one of the hardest things in the world for one of you fellows to get away for a night."

"So it is, but somehow I have got a cinch with the old man, and can pull his leg a little if I don't pull too hard or too often."

"I suppose you had to do an assignment before he would let you go."

"Yes, but it was a dead easy one. There was a knifing affray in a saloon on — street, and he sent me to do that. Had my story done and time to prepare before the train left."

"I thought it funny if he would let you off without a story first."

"I had a rather strange experience to-night in connection with that saloon affair."

"So?"

"Yes. Just as I was hurrying out, I ran plump into a woman who had been peering in slyly between the swinging

doors. Thinking possibly I had at the same time run into another item for my story, I spoke to her. She tried to avoid me, but I stepped out with her and asked her what she had been doing there. She said she was looking for her husband, and I offered to go back and inquire for him for her. You see, I knew by her voice and manner she was no common person. She gave me his name; I went back, no such man was ever heard of in the saloon; returned for the woman and found her gone! What do you think of that?"

"Why, I think she found an easy way of giving you an ice-cold shake."

Bess had glanced at Sam during the recital, giving him a smile and a nod in the direction of the two men.

"Well, I am inclined to think so myself; but do you know that little incident has been in my mind ever since. I can't seem to get away from it."

"Maybe the woman was young and good-looking?"

"As to that I can't say, for she wore a veil."

"Big thing for a romance, Lineman; mysterious woman, mysterious mission, and a north-pole cut to a meddling quidnunc. Go in and do it."

At mention of the name Lineman, Bess and Sam glanced at each other.

Could it be that this was the man whose name had been mentioned between Albert Whitley and Elbridge Parmer as the lover of Miss Whitley?

Be that as it might, Bess had to smile at the remarks of the young man's companion, and she and Scorch Sam entered into conversation in lower tones, still giving some attention to what was being said.

Further back in the same car, were the two men we have mentioned as having kept out of sight of Scorch Sam, after sighting him.

They had their hats pulled well down, and were sitting low in their seats. They were none other than two of the trio who had set upon Bicycle Sam at the time his prisoner was taken away from him, and who had later accosted Bicycle Bess.

CHAPTER VI.

THE CRY IN THE DARK.

Meanwhile the train went speeding on its way through the night, past hamlets, and through towns, but, at last Podunkville was called out, and a number of passengers rose to their feet to get off the train, but not the two men we have just mentioned.

They kept their seats until the train was starting on, when they ran out and dropped off on the side of the track opposite the station platform.

When the last car of the train had passed, they were not to be seen.

The Scorch and Bicycle Bess had risen to their feet at the mention of the station and advanced to the door.

Sam wanted to get out as quickly as possible in order to look after their wheels, and while they stood there at the door waiting for the train to stop Sam got something of a surprise.

A young woman appeared at the door of the other car, facing him—the young woman whom he had befriended early that evening!

She gave a start of recognition at once.

It was Miss Whitley, and as the train slackened speed and drew to a stop and they ventured out upon the car platforms, she said:

"I believe that I am not mistaken, sir, and that you are the person who ren-

dered me a great service early this evening. If so, I want to thank you for it."

"Pray do not mention it, Miss Whitledge," said Sam. "No one would fail to respond to a lady's cry for help, I hope."

"But, how did you know my name?" she asked, bewildered.

"Through the two gentlemen—"

"Gentlemen, indeed! But, of course! How stupid of me."

The train had now stopped, and the young woman noticed that Sam lent aid to Bicycle Bess in alighting.

As Sam ran immediately forward to the baggage car, Miss Whitledge spoke to her.

"Your husband, I presume?" she remarked.

"Well, not yet," said Bess naively.

They both smiled.

"He is very brave," said Miss Whitledge. "I am sure you have good reason to feel proud of him."

"And I do, as I am sure you must of Mr. Lineman."

The young woman started and stared.

"Why—what—how," she tried to say something. "You must be acquainted, here, surely."

"No, I am not, but the fact is I have come out here on purpose to see you—"

"On purpose to see me? You surprise me! What for?"

"To warn you of a danger that threatens you, and at the same time to aid you in trapping those who would entrap you."

The train was now going on, the other passengers had left the platform, and Sam was approaching with the wheels.

He stooped to light the lamps while the young women were talking.

"I am more than amazed," said Miss Whitledge. "I am dumfounded, and cannot understand how you have come by so much knowledge."

"It is my intention to tell you that I was going to inquire for you at once, on reaching here, and go immediately to your house to see you."

"Then you did not know I was on the train?"

"No."

"And what did you have to tell me?"

"As I said, to warn you of a danger that threatens you, and to ask the privilege of impersonating you to-morrow for the purpose of entrapping your foes."

"Gracious! I cannot comprehend—"

"Pardon me," said Scorcher Sam, now rising and touching his cap, "but we both belong to the New York Police Bicycle Squad, and having learned something of this plot against you we are determined to sift it out and bask the rascally schemes that are being laid."

The young woman could only look from one to the other in her great astonishment.

"My first idea," Sam continued, "was to let you go to the city unsuspecting to-morrow, and by following you, rescue you and at the same time learn what I desire to know of your enemies."

"But I have no intention of going to the city to-morrow, sir."

"Not now, of course, but you will receive a telegram to-morrow purporting to be from John Lineman, summoning you to the city in haste."

"And I would go, of course, for he is very dear to me."

"That seems to be well known, and that is the string your enemies intend to play upon to entrap you."

"And you would impersonate me and take all the risk?" turning to Bicycle Bess.

"That is just what I want to do."

"But what if it should be no decoy message, but a real one, and really from John—"

"By the way," Bess interrupted, "John Lineman is not in the city; he came out here to-night in the same car we were in."

"What! John home?"

"Yes, he must have gone away immediately."

"But tell me, pray, how you came by so much knowledge concerning me and all these matters?"

"That will take a little time. If you will permit Miss Blake to accompany you home she will tell you all about it. I will escort you to your residence, and then seek the hotel for myself."

"No, no; do not do that; both of you come with me, for we have room and to spare."

"And shall we not leave our wheels here?" Bess asked, turning to Sam.

"Nothing of the kind," Miss Whitledge hastened to say. "My own is here in the station, if you will wait a few minutes while I change my skirt and get it out."

Miss Whitledge hastened into the station and spoke to the night man on duty, who immediately ran a fine ladies' wheel out of his office and proceeded to light its lamp while Miss Whitledge absented herself to make the change she had mentioned.

"How far is it out to Miss Whitledge's home?" inquired Scorcher Sam.

"About a mile, sir."

"Good road?"

"Fine, sir; right on the main pike."

Just then the young lady herself reappeared.

She had on a short skirt and leggings, and a bag held by a strap from her shoulder spoke for the changed garments.

The trio led their wheels from the platform to the road, where they mounted and were away at once.

They had just entered a piece of woods, when a cry was heard ahead.

They listened.

It was immediately repeated.

"If that is not a cry for help I am greatly mistaken," said Scorcher Sam. "I must spin ahead and see what is the matter."

"Yes, go, by all means," urged Bicycle Bess.

"And we will try to keep pace with him," said Miss Whitledge.

"As to keeping up with Scorcher Sam, you can no more do it than you can fly. See where he is already, in proof."

The reflection of Sam's lamp was dancing along on the ground several rods in advance of them, and was speedily distancing them.

"You do not mean to say he is Scorcher Sam, the detective?"

"There is only one Scorcher Sam," assured Bess.

"Then you must be Bicycle Bess?"

"So I am called."

"I have seen your name once or twice in connection with his. Really, I never dreamed of this honor—but I wonder what is the matter, and who it was screamed?"

The cry had been heard once more.

"Sam will soon find out."

"Yes, for he must be nearly there, I should think. Good heavens!"

Two quick, sharp flashes were seen, immediately followed by the report of two pistol shots.

"Come!" cried Bess, quickly. "We may be needed there!" and Bess fairly ran away from her companion, in her eagerness to join Scorcher Sam.

CHAPTER VII.

COWARDLY ASSAULT.

The Scorcher had gone forward with almost the speed of an arrow from the bow.

He had an excellent lamp on his wheel, and having been over that road once before, he remembered this portion of it.

He knew that everything was clear before him, so far as the wheeling was concerned, so he let out his speed, eager to reach the scene of the struggle as quickly as possible.

In the distant rays of his lamp he soon caught his first glimpse of what was going on.

One man lay on the ground, half-crosswise of the road, and two more were running away from him with all the speed of which their legs were capable.

"Stop!"

So Sam called out to them.

They heeded him not, however, but ran the faster.

He was gaining upon them at every second and soon must overtake them.

"Stop, or I fire!"

And he did not tarry about firing, either, but blazed away, the two shots seen and heard by the young women.

Just then he came to the spot where the man lay in the road and had to veer out to pass around him, and when he had done so the two men ahead were in the act of taking to the woods.

They did not go together, but parted, and one disappeared on one side of the road and the other on the opposite.

Sam sent a couple more shots zipping after them and stopped.

It would be useless for him to try to follow either of them in the dark in an unknown wood.

Besides, he was afraid his companions would run upon the man lying in the road and perhaps receive injury.

Turning quickly, he ran back, at the same time shouting:

"Look out there in the road!"

It was lucky, perhaps, that he did so, for Bicycle Bess was at that moment almost upon the man.

She applied the brake and stopped at short notice, and immediately called out a warning to Miss Whitledge.

Scorcher Sam ran up to where the man lay and stopped short with his brake.

By the time he dismounted Miss Whitledge came up.

The light from Sam's lamp was upon the man as he lay there unconscious.

"The man I told you about," cried Bess.

"My God!" exclaimed Miss Whitledge. "It is John Lineman!"

Leaning her wheel against that of Bess, she knelt down beside her lover and lifted his head.

"Oh, is he dead?" she cried. "Tell me he is not dead, sir!"

Sam had now disposed of his wheel, and he, too, stopped beside the unfortunate man.

"No, he is not dead. Let me see how badly he is hurt, if I can."

Sam proceeded to do so, by the light of the bicycle lamps, and found that the young man had received some telling blows on the head.

He could not discover that he was in any other way injured.

"I think he will come to all right, though this is likely to lay him up for a time," he said.

"Thank God!"

"Where does he live?"

"The first house ahead, about a quarter of a mile away."

"Any men about the place?"

"His father."

"I will spin on down there and get him, and if he has got a wagon—"

"Yes, yes, he has, sir. Oh, pray hasten. How can I ever repay—"

"By not mentioning it. But, you are not afraid to remain here? You are armed, Bess?"

"Yes, I am armed. You go on; we'll be all right."

Scorcher Sam mounted his wheel and was off at once, and the two ladies put their wheels by the side of the road and lifted the unconscious man up and laid him on the grassy bank.

"What if those two scoundrels should return?" suggested Miss Whitledge.

"Don't give yourself any uneasiness about them," answered Bess. "I am looking out for them, and it will not be healthy for them if they do."

And thus, while Bicycle Bess stood guard Miss Whitledge rubbed her lover's hands and tried to bring him back to consciousness.

In about a quarter of an hour a light was seen afar down the road.

"They are coming," said Bess.

The light flickered and danced and gradually drew nearer, and after awhile the sound of a horse and wagon reached their ears.

The vehicle was coming at speed, and at length it arrived and came to a stop.

Scorcher Sam was just ahead with his bicycle.

"How is my boy?" asked Mr. Lineman.

"He is just the same, sir," said Bess.

"Then it looks serious indeed," said Sam. "We had better have a doctor here as soon as possible."

"And the nearest one is in the village."

"Very well, I will help you place your son in the wagon and then ride to the village with haste and bring him out."

"If you only will."

He had now alighted and he advanced to where his son lay.

"Poor boy, poor boy," he said. "God grant that you may live, for it would kill your poor mother."

Tenderly they laid him in the wagon, and Mr. Lineman turned and set out for home, Bicycle Bess and Miss Whitledge following on their wheels, while Scorcher Sam went spinning away in the opposite direction.

When Sam returned with the doctor—also a wheelman—John Lineman had regained consciousness. He had no recollection further than that he had been attacked and that he had called for help. He could not tell who his assailants were.

The doctor made an examination, as soon as the injured young man had been put into bed, and found that there was no fracture of the skull. His hat had probably saved his life.

The hour was very late when Miss Whitledge and her two guests reached the former's home.

The house was closed and dark, of course.

Miss Whitledge roused the servants and she and her guests were soon admitted.

"Now, what is to be done?" Miss Whitledge asked, as they sat down for a few minutes in the sitting room before retiring.

"I have been studying the situation," said Scorcher Sam, "and I will wheel back to the city at once, I believe."

"Goodness!" cried Bess. "What will you do that for?"

"Because I want to be there in the morning to be on hand for whatever may turn up."

"But your reason?"

"I have been thinking that maybe the fellows who laid John Lineman out followed him here from the city. And in that case I may overtake them on my way in, for they will avoid the railroad and yet will want to get back as soon as possible."

"And what about him?"

"There is another point. If these fellows came here from the city and came on purpose to do John Lineman up, it may be possible that no message will come for Miss Whitledge to-morrow."

"That would imply that Elbridge Parmer has had a hand in the matter," said Miss Whitledge quickly.

"Yes, that is what I mean."

"And there was opportunity," said Bess. "You know, Sam, he went back to the saloon for me, as I told you, and Parmer and those other two were there at that time."

Miss Whitledge was looking at Bess wonderingly.

"I will tell you all about it presently," Bess said to her.

"That is my suspicion," said Sam.

"And if he was the author of it, perhaps those two men were his tools, and if I can run across them before they get back to the city I will know that my suspicion is correct."

"That's so, that's so. But, I ought to return with you, Sam. They will be two to one."

"You could not stand it, Bess. You need rest. Besides, if that is a wrong guess, you will be needed here to play your role as Miss Whitledge to-morrow, you know."

"Yes, that is true."

"It will take me about three hours to run in to the city," said Sam. "If I meet with no misadventure, I will go home and go to bed, and will wait there to hear from you by telegraph in the morning. Telegraph anyhow, and if the scheme is carried on, give me the place of meeting."

There was some further talk, and then Sam took leave and set forth upon his long ride, while Bicycle Bess and Miss Whitledge entered upon a confidential chat.

CHAPTER VIII.

A CLOSE SHAVE AND A HOT FIGHT.

Any road that Scorcher Sam had been over once he knew pretty well.

Hence, he was not uncertain of his way when he set out from the Whitledge homestead for his night spin of thirty miles.

The night was clear and bright, although there was no moon, and the lamp on his wheel was all sufficient for his guidance as he speeded swiftly along over the smooth macadam.

For the first hour of his journey nothing happened at all worthy of mention.

But soon after something did.

Sam was going down a gentle slope, and as the surface was excellent he was going at a good speed, when of a sudden he caught sight of something that looked like a string stretched across the road.

Of course, he was almost upon it when the discovery was made.

Constantly peering ahead through the gloom as he rode along, smaller objects than even that did not escape his notice.

If ever he had need of a brake it was then. No sooner the obstruction seen, than the brake was applied and his speed checked.

He was almost stopped when the cord, for such it was, caught him across the breast and brought him to a dead stop.

At the same instant two men leaped out at him.

One of these came from each side of the road, and they were almost upon him before Sam was safely on his feet.

"Hand out yer money!" cried one of them.

Sam's fist came in contact with his mouth about as soon as the words had been uttered, and down he went.

The other was upon Sam in the same instant, and grappled with him.

"Ye had better give in," the fellow snarled.

"You think I had, eh?"

Before he hardly knew what had happened Sam had whirled him over his shoulder and he came down on the hard road with a thud.

The other man was up again, though, and had a pistol in his grasp, as Sam saw by the starlight that glinted on its polished barrel. The bicycle lamp was out.

The machine, by the way, had fallen and that had extinguished the light.

"Put up yer hands!" that fellow savagely ordered. "It is yer money or yer life, an' ye kin take yer choice!"

"Don't shoot!" gasped Sam, as if alarmed at the prospect. "I'll shell out the little I've got."

"You better had, I tell you."

"Kill him!" grated the man who was on his back, as he tried to get up again. "Let him have it!"

Sam had shoved his hands into his pockets as he spoke, as if to get out his money, but that was not by any means his intention.

With a leap aside, his right arm shot up and out, and there was a revolver in his grip.

Not only so, but there was a flash and a report.

This was followed instantly by a howl of pain, and the fellow's pistol arm dropped helpless to his side and the weapon to the ground.

"Do you want some of the same?" cried Sam, turning his weapon upon the man on the ground, who was just in the act of rising.

Sam moved while speaking, and lucky, perhaps, that he did so.

There was another flash and report, and a bullet came so close to his face that he felt its wind as it passed.

Sam fired again, like a flash, but this time missed his mark.

He had fired at the hand that held the pistol.

The shot had a good effect all the same, for with a howl of fright the fellow dropped his pistol and took to his heels.

"Stop!" shouted Sam. "Stop! Or I will stop you!"

He stooped and picked up the pistol the other fellow had dropped, to make sure it would not be used against him again.

"Better cave, Ben!" called out the man Sam had winged.

"Nary stop!" cried the other, as he ran faster. "Don't you split who we are, and I'll fetch help to you 'fore you git et in the neck."

"You will, eh?" cried Scorcher Sam.

He stopped and aimed deliberately at the figure that was rapidly disappearing in the gloom.

There was a flash and a report, and a howl of pain immediately followed as the man went down all in a heap in the middle of the road.

"Your own fault," Sam called out. "You would have it, and so you got it."

The first was now on his feet and was trying to slink away, but Sam turned

and ordered him to stop or he would give him another dose of the same medicine. "And now give me your well arm," said Sam.

"What yer goin' to do?"

"I'll show you. I'm going to make sure of you."

He approached the fellow, his pistol ready for still further service if necessary.

The man was thoroughly cowed now, and held out his arm as ordered, when Sam snapped a handcuff on his wrist.

At the touch and the click the man gave a great start.

"You!" he exclaimed.

"Yes, I. You know me, then?"

"Know all I want to about ye, and more."

"Come along, then, and we'll see how your pal is faring."

Sam led the prisoner down the road to where the other fellow was lying.

They found him moaning dismally.

"Your own fault," said Sam again. "I warned you, and I warn you now that if you resist further I will finish the job for you."

"Who the mischief are you, anyhow?"

"Well, they call me Scorchers Sam, on the force."

"Great Scott!"

"Get up here, now," Sam ordered.

"I can't; you have wounded me in the leg."

"Is the bone broken?"

"Yes, I guess it is, it feels so, anyhow. I can't go with ye a step, so ye will have to leave me here."

"Oh, no; I am not leaving you. If you can't walk I will find some means of getting you down to the town there, where I am going to hand you over to the authorities."

"Then you won't give us no show?"

"Yes, a good deal more than you were giving me with this string here across the road for me to run into."

"But we didn't know it was you, honor bright."

"Well, you will not play the same trick again in a hurry."

"But can't ye let us off with what we have got?" asked the one called Ben.

"No, and won't. Besides, you are wanted for that affair back there at Podunkville."

"We didn't kill nobody there, we only laid him out—"

"Hold your tongue, Wood, you fool!" cried Ben. "We don't know nothing about no other matter; let him prove et ef he kin."

"I want to know all about that affair," said Sam. "Was it Elbridge Parmer put you up to it?"

"Blazes! Is there anything you don't know?"

That answered the question well enough for all purposes.

"I thought so. Now the best thing you can do is to make a clean breast of the whole business."

"Do ye take us fer fools altogether?" demanded the one called Ben. "If ye do, you will get left. Don't say another word to him, pal, about nothin'."

"All right, I'm mum."

"Well, let's see about that leg," said Sam. "Get up here and let's find out how much you are hurt. You have got to hobble down there to that town in the valley."

"I can't never do it."

"Wait, and I'll see. Hold up your right hand here."

The fellow obeyed, at the touch of Sam's weapon to his head, and the other half of the handcuff was quickly secured to it.

"There you are. Run away if you want to, but you will not go far. Meanwhile I will get my wheel and light the lamp and then I'll see about your case."

Knowing well enough that they could not get away from him now, Sam retraced his steps to where his wheel lay, and the first thing he did was to cut the cord the villains had stretched across the road at that point.

Having done that, he lighted the lantern and pushed the wheel to the place where he had left them.

They were still there.

"Well, that is pretty good proof that you are lame sure enough," Scorchers Sam remarked, "or you would have tried running away. Let's see that game leg."

The fellow had a bullet in his thigh, but the bone did not appear to be broken.

Sam made him get up, and finding that he could stand, compelled the luckless pair to precede him down the hill in the direction of the village, both complaining bitterly of their hard luck.

On the way down Sam tried to induce them to tell him all they knew of the schemes that were on foot, but they would not do so unless he would promise to release them and let them go, and of course he would not do that.

"Well, no matter," he said finally. "It will take a little longer, but I'll get there just the same."

Arriving in the village, which was about a mile from where the fracas had taken place, every house was found to be dark and closed.

It was then 2 o'clock in the morning.

Sam remembered the place and knew where the hotel was located, and going there he made a din at the door that soon brought the night-capped head of the landlord into view.

"Hello!" the landlord shouted. "What's the matter down there?"

"Just come down here," said Sam. "I want your help."

"Who are you? What do you want?"

"I am a New York detective and I have got a brace of wounded prisoners on my hands."

"All right, I'll be down there in a minute."

And he was as good as his word. The door was soon thrown open to Sam, who briefly told what had taken place.

"And now I want your Justice of the Peace and a Constable," Scorchers Sam concluded. "And not only that, but I think a doctor had better be had for them, for they are both wounded, as I told you."

The landlord called others to his aid and there was some lively hustling around there.

In a short time the village doctor was on hand, and a little later the Constable and the Justice of the Peace made their appearance.

The Justice heard Sam's story and as soon as the doctor had seen to the prisoners' wounds as well as he could, the Justice heard what they had to say and committed them.

A team was gotten ready and they were bundled into a wagon and sent off to the county jail, while Scorchers Sam, feeling by that time the need of some rest, took a room and retired to bed, with orders that he should be called in time for breakfast and a certain train to the city.

CHAPTER IX.

PLAYING THE SCHEMES.

When Sam was called, and it seemed to him only a minute or two after retiring, he felt refreshed.

A good wash, a hot breakfast, and he was almost as good as new, and when he

took the train at the station he felt equal to anything the day might bring forth.

Reaching the city he went straight home.

There he took his customary hot bath, after which he spent the time with his morning paper while he waited.

According to his arrangement with Bicycle Bess, he would receive a telegram anyhow, whether it would be important or not. That remained to be seen when it came.

He hardly hoped for the carrying on of the scheme now.

The fact that John Lineman had been waylaid near his home at Podunkville made it look reasonable that the plans of the villains would have to be altered to suit that circumstance.

Meanwhile, Bicycle Bess and Estelle Whitledge were enjoying each other's company.

Rooming together that night they had chatted till a late hour, and Bess had learned all about the heroine of our story.

Estelle's parents were dead. At the death of her father, following her mother's death, her uncle, Albert Whitledge, had been appointed her guardian.

Estelle knew that she was wealthy in her own right, but as she was not quite of legal age her uncle had not yet made a settlement with her respecting her estates.

As her uncle bore an excellent name and had always been considered a man of strictest integrity, she had never given a thought to her property. Now, however, after what had taken place, and after what Bessie Blake was able to reveal to her, her eyes were opened.

She told Bess that her uncle had gone to the city two days before, and from there had telegraphed to her to come and join him. Not knowing what he desired, but trusting him fully, she had responded by going.

There she found Elbridge Parmer in company with her uncle, and her uncle urged an immediate marriage between them.

Naturally, Estelle rebelled.

At first her uncle had used only argument, telling her that he had only her best good at heart. Then he went a step further and urged it as a matter not only of sentiment, but as a matter of business. Finding that she would not hear to his proposal, he threatened.

It went so far, at last, that she feared force, and ran away from them. They followed her and had just overtaken her when Scorchers Sam appeared upon the scene and took a hand in the affair in her behalf.

The young woman could not express gratitude enough to Sam for his timely interference.

Estelle and Bess were up betimes.

"There is one thing that we have not figured on," remarked Bess as they ate breakfast.

"What is that?" asked Estelle.

"Your uncle."

"What about him?"

"He is coming home this morning, as I happen to know. Will his train get here before the 10 o'clock train leaves?"

"No, it is not likely that he will take the very earliest train out. He usually comes out on the one getting here at 11 o'clock, when he has remained over night in the city."

"Well, he will find you here."

"Yes."

"And what if he telegraphs right away to the rascals in the city that you are here, that will put a spoke in my wheel—pardon my slang."

"We must prevent that, somehow."

"Sure. But you are not likely to be sent for, as it looks to me now that Mr. Lineman has been disposed of, as they will believe, until they learn that he is alive."

"That's so."

"And yet you may, for they may not learn of that in time."

"I must leave it all with you, Miss Blake. Whatever you advise, that I will do, no matter what."

"Have you any idea who it was waylaid your lover?"

"No. Had it been in New York—"

"What if it had been there?"

"Then I would say it had been the work of Elbridge Parmer."

"Ha! That is the very thought. Is there anything that would make you particularly suspicious of him?"

"Yes, there is."

"What?"

"Why, when they were trying to force me to wed him, as I told you, I informed them that I was already engaged to Mr. Lineman, and Parmer swore a mighty oath that I should never wed him."

"I see. And then he went to that saloon where I saw him, and there talked with those two rascals who spoke to me on the street, Wood and Ben, as they were called. Maybe he engaged them to follow Mr. Lineman, when he left the place the second time."

"That is it—that must be it!" exclaimed Estelle.

"Of course, Parmer had no idea that he was coming out here, but as he did come out here the two men followed him. They must have been on the same train we came out on."

"That is it; I can see it plainly now. What a head you have for thinking things out, my dear."

"You wrong me there, or I would have seen through it a good deal sooner. Now, supposing that guess to be correct, there is just a chance that you may be sent for this morning."

"What is that chance?"

"That the two men do not get back to the city in time to report before Lineman sends the telegram."

"That's so. Do you know, I am really excited over it. I really must go to the city with you, if I am sent for and you carry out your intention."

"No, no; that would not do. I must go alone, for that would arouse suspicion."

"But, think of the danger."

"Sam is there. But, if you are done your breakfast, we must act."

They repaired soon after to the sitting room, where they put their heads together.

"I see you have two servants here," said Bess. "Are they to be trusted? Dare you trust them not to tell your uncle if we take them into our confidence?"

"Yes, yes, I can trust them."

"Then call them here."

They were called.

Bess took it upon herself to tell them enough of what was in the wind to enlist their sympathy in the behalf of their mistress.

"Now," said she, "it will depend largely upon you whether we can carry out the plan successfully or not. I am going to prepare for the city, and if your mistress is sent for I am going in her stead."

"Yes, ma'am."

"She will remain in her room, and you must let her uncle think that she has really gone to the city. Do you understand?"

"Oh, yes, ma'am."

"And the cheat must not be discovered."

"You can trust us for that, ma'am. We love her too well to betray her to that old bear."

"Then there is no doubt of the success of the scheme," said Bess to Estelle. "Your bicycle I will use, and mine must be put out of sight here where it will not be discovered."

"But how can you ever change at the station?" asked the puzzled young lady.

"Oh! You trust me for that. We are about of a size, and all I want are your clothes and wheel. I will take care of the rest."

"Well, I leave it all to you."

"Then let us be about it instantly, for there is no time to lose. The telegram may come any moment, and then if that uncle of yours should come out on the early train—"

"My goodness! What if he should?"

"I must be prepared to face him, that is all."

"Oh! You would not dare."

"Wouldn't I? You let him come and see if I wouldn't. I have faced worse old dragons than he, and I am still alive."

So, while the servants put Bess's wheel away, the two young women went up to Estelle's private room, where Bess proceeded to don Estelle's garments and take on her identity.

"There, what do you think of me?"

So Bess asked at last, when the last touch had been added and she stood before Estelle with her veil down.

"I would not believe it!" cried the girl, "had I not seen it with my own eyes! It makes me think that I am out of the body and am viewing myself at a distance."

Bess laughed.

At that moment heavy steps and a gruff voice were heard in the hall below.

"Good heavens!" cried Estelle, clasping her hands together in dismay, "there's my uncle!"

"Don't be alarmed," said Bess coolly. "I will take care of him. All I ask of you is to keep out of sight."

"Yes, yes, I will do that; but I am so alarmed for you."

"You need not be, I assure you."

Hasty steps came running up the stairs, and there came a tap at the door.

Bess opened it, and there stood one of the servants, her face as pale as death with fright, for she did not see any way out of the dilemma.

She came in and closed the door, and there was a hastily whispered conversation for a moment, in which Bess gave final directions, and then Bicycle Bess opened the door and went boldly out and down to the hall. The servant followed her timidly.

CHAPTER X.

BESS IN A NEW ROLE.

Albert Whitledge was pacing the hall like some furious beast of prey as Bess descended the stairs.

"Well, where to now?" he snarled.

"I am going to leave this house, sir," she boldly answered, imitating as well as she could the voice of Estelle. "You have no need to ask me the reason why."

"Oh! Haven't I?"

"No, you have not, and I warn you not to try to detain me."

"Have you heard the news this morning?"

"What news?"

"About that precious lover of yours, John Lineman?"

"What about him? Has anything hap-

pened to him? Do not keep it from me, if so."

Albert Whitledge had heard about the attack upon Lineman immediately upon his arrival home, at the station, and he supposed, of course, that his niece knew all about it.

He now felt assured that she had not heard anything about it.

A grim smile played on his lips.

"Well, I suppose you were going to him, anyhow, so it will be all right to tell you. Here is a telegram for you, which had just been received at the station as my train got in, and I carried it over for you. The operator told me about it."

Bess took the envelope and tore it open eagerly, playing her role to perfection.

Her veil was down, of course.

She took out the sheet with a nervous haste, and, for the benefit of Estelle, who she knew was listening, she read the message aloud:

It was as follows:

"Estelle Whitledge,

"Podunkville, N. J.

"Please come to me at once. Have met with serious accident. Do not tell father or mother yet. Come at once, by next train, and take cab straight to No. — street. JOHN LINEMAN."

"Mercy!" cried Bess, still closely imitating Estelle, "what can have happened, I wonder?"

"I don't know, and under any other circumstances I would forbid your leaving the house, but I suppose your mind is set upon him, and there will be no turning you. Go to him if you want to."

"Yes, to be sure that I am going," said Bess, spiritedly, "and I would like to see you detain me against my will. We will meet again, Albert Whitledge."

"Hussy! What do you mean now?"

He seized her by the arm with a fierce clutch.

"I will show you what I mean, it is needless to tell you."

"You threaten me?" he cried, shaking her roughly. "You dare to threaten me? I warn you here and now to keep a still tongue, girl!"

"And I order you to remove your hand, and that at once," cried Bess, as she drew her pistol from her pocket and thrust it under his nose. "You will find that Estelle Whitledge is not afraid of you, sir!"

He had let go his hold in a hurry at the first sight of the pistol and leaped back, his face white and scared.

"Don't!" he cried. "Don't point that at me!"

"Then you just don't, too," said Bess, and then turning to the servant:

"Mary, is my wheel by the front steps, as I told you?"

"Yes, Miss Estelle."

"Then I am going. Good-by, and say good-by to Susan for me. I will see you again perhaps before very long."

"Good-by," responded the servant, and Bess started to go, nor did Whitledge offer to detain her further, though he did call after her:

"And mind the word of warning I have given you, for I mean what I say, and you know what I mean. No need to go into particulars before a gaping servant."

"I have no time to talk to you, or I shall miss my train."

"And so miss that precious lover!"

Bess did not respond, but mounted the wheel and was off in the direction of the station at once.

Whitledge stepped out and gazed after

her, with no look of love on his hard, cruel face.

"If she can only get by Lineman's place without being stopped," he muttered to himself. "Ha! She is going at good speed, and that will lessen the chances. I'll just watch. She hasn't got any more time 'n she wants to get that train."

He did watch, and as Bess went wheeling past the Lineman place he saw Mr. Lineman come out just after she had passed and swing his hat after her.

He had evidently hailed her, but she did not stop.

"Ha!" cried Whitledge, "that is good. She knew she hadn't time to stop, and if he has merely said John is hurt, or somethin' like that, she has no doubt answered that she knew it. Ha, ha, ha! It works all right so far, Parmer, and now it is for you to do the rest. Once she is your wife she will not be apt to kick over the traces, I guess."

He went into the house rubbing his hands.

Meantime, Bess was speeding straight for the station. Mr. Lineman had hailed her, but with the shout that she would stop coming back Bess had skimmed right along without turning her head.

She believed that Whitledge was watching.

At the station she leaned the wheel against the ticket office within the waiting-room, and made haste to change her skirt in the ladies' private room.

When she made her appearance the agent greeted her, doffing his hat as he did so.

"There is something very strange, Miss Whitledge," he said. "Your telegram summons you to New York, but the fact of the business is John was hurt here last night and is now at home. I can't understand it."

"I understand how it is, Mr. Willis," she said—Estelle had posted her as to his name. "Can I trust you?"

"You know you can do that," he assured.

"Well, the fact is, there is a game afoot, the particulars of which I can't stop to tell you now, and I must go to New York. If my uncle should come and ask you if I heard anything about John before I started, just fib a little and tell him no."

"Ah! I begin to see. Maybe the report at this end is the fiction, and there is an elopement on hand—No., don't deny it, don't say anything; I am as dumb as an oyster, Miss Whitledge, and they won't get a peep out of me."

"Don't breathe a word," said Bess, giving him her hand. "Here is the train."

She ran out, and the agent returned to his office, smiling broadly at his own cleverness and at the confidence that had been reposed in him, never aware of the wool that had been cleverly pulled over his eyes.

Bess had Miss Whitledge's mileage book, too, and so passed for her even on the train.

No sooner had she taken her seat in the car than she took paper and pencil from her pocket and wrote the telegram intended for Scorcher Sam.

For good reasons she had not attempted to send it from the station at Podunkville.

It was soon written, and when the conductor passed through the car she gave it to him, with money, and asked him to be sure and have it sent from the next station.

Bicycle Bess was clever, and was seldom at loss.

What she had written was this:

"Samuel Buckley,

(with address) "New York.

"On train eleven-thirty city. Cab direct to No. — street. Everything working as planned.

"ESTELLE WHITLEDGE."

It had been arranged that Miss Whitledge's name should be signed to the message. Sam would know who had sent it, and he would be on hand to play his part in the game.

The address given, by the way, was the real address of John Lineman's city lodging.

This, however, Bicycle Bess did not know.

Estelle Whitledge, on hearing the message read, could hardly prevent herself from making this known to the young woman who was so boldly working in her behalf.

She knew not what to make of it, knowing that her lover was lying at his own home not more than a quarter of a mile away.

But she readily saw through it.

She would have been suspicious had any address other than the real one been given.

The bold rascals were working their scheme well, and she knew that Bessie Blake was running great risks. She wished that she might be able to share them with her.

Now that it was too late she regretted that she had not taken an earlier train to the city herself, there to remain on hand awaiting Bessie's coming, and yet she did not clearly see what she could have accomplished. No, Bessie would have to take her chances, now.

Bicycle Bess was ever ready to do that, and felt confidence in her ability to take care of herself.

Reaching the city, she took a cab and ordered the driver to take her to the address given, and in due time was set down at the number.

It was a respectable house on a respectable street, and not at all what she had anticipated. In fact, the address had puzzled her from the start.

Getting out when the cab stopped, she paid the fare that had been agreed upon, and as the cabbie pocketed his silver and drove off she mounted the steps and rang the bell.

CHAPTER XI.

PLOTS VERSUS PLOTS.

Scorcher Sam was quietly smoking when there came a tap at his door.

He had heard the bell and was anticipating the knock, so he had the door open in about two seconds' time.

There was a telegram, and as he was prepared for its reception, he had no sooner read it than he grabbed his hat and left the house.

He was in his bicycle suit and took his wheel.

He went to the house and rang the bell.

"Does Mr. John Lineman live here?" he inquired.

"Yes, sir," was the prompt answer.

"Is he in?"

"No, sir. He has been hurt; he is in the hospital."

"Hurt? In the hospital? What hospital is he in, do you know?"

The girl promptly named the one, and there being nothing else to do, Sam took leave.

Here was something that puzzled him not a little, and his mind was busy as he rode slowly away on his wheel.

It would be out of the question for him to go to the hospital and get back in time to meet Bicycle Bess, no use thinking about that.

Not that he believed John Lineman was there, for he knew he was not; but it was possible that some one was there in his name, that something had happened—

He cut speculation short.

Knowing where there was a telephone, he rode there, and called up the hospital.

No, no one of that name was there; no one had been brought in that morning. And Scorcher Sam then began to see light shining in the dark place. It was a scheme.

By the time he could get back to the house he might look for the coming of Bess at any moment.

He rode back and waited.

Standing at a corner, half a block away, he appeared to be resting or waiting the coming of some one who had promised to meet him there.

While he waited he saw an empty cab drive down the street, but he gave it no particular thought or attention until presently he saw it going slowly in the opposite direction.

He now watched it, and when it had gone a distance down the street it turned and came slowly back again.

"Ah! I begin to see," said Sam to himself.

Presently another cab came along, turned the corner, and as it passed Sam a hand slyly signaled to him.

This cab rolled up to the door of the number desired, and we have seen what immediately took place there. The door was quickly opened to Bess.

She stood there for a few moments, and Scorcher Sam knew as well as if he had been on the spot just about what was being said. The girl was telling what she honestly believed to be true, that John Lineman had been injured and was in the hospital.

Bess presently turned away and descended the steps.

She was in a very troubled frame of mind, because she could not for the life of her understand the situation.

Pausing at the bottom of the steps, she looked up and down the street, and a cab was at the moment passing slightly drew up and she called the attention of the driver.

"Want a cab?" the driver asked.

"Yes, I want to go to the — Hospital."

"All right, ma'am, get right in and we're off at once."

Climbing in, the cab rattled away with her.

"Now, then, for the game," said Scorcher Sam, as he mounted his wheel and started after the cab. "This is one of the cleverest tricks that I ever saw played, and I thought I knew them all."

As they went along, Sam saw Bess look out once, and he gave her a signal to reassure her.

Now Bicycle Bess knew the location of the hospital well enough, well acquainted with New York as she was, and when the cabman went out of the direct route there she "caught on."

She saw that she had entered a decoy cab, one that had been waiting around there on purpose to pick her up.

She was glad it was she and not the real victim of their schemes.

The cab rolled and jolted along, and at last it drew to a stop before what had the appearance of being a huge public building.

It was a building that had been recently vacated by a large concern that had moved into new and even more commodious quarters, and it was awaiting new tenants.

A stranger stopping before its entrance might have readily mistaken it for a hospital, expecting to arrive at such a destination.

Bicycle Bess alighted from the cab, taking note that Scorcher Sam was not far away.

She paid her fare and turned toward the entrance of the building.

It looked dark and sombre.

As she approached the door, however, it opened and a man in a sort of blue livery bowed her entrance.

She had delayed a little in paying the driver, in order to give Sam time to run up, and he was now at hand, and just as Bess entered the door he ran up the steps and sprang in immediately behind her.

He was none too soon, for the man in the blue coat was in the very act of closing and securing the door.

Already another man had attempted to seize Bicycle Bess, but she had him held up at the point of her revolver, and as Sam sprang in he grappled with the man who had opened the door.

This fellow was no match for an athlete like Sam, and Sam had him down in about ten seconds and the handcuffs on his wrists.

But the end was not yet.

Just as Sam was getting up there came a scream of warning from Bess, but it was too late, for at the same instant two other men threw themselves upon the intrepid detective.

"Let up on him!" cried Bess, instantly. "If you don't, I shoot this fellow!"

"Shoot and be hanged to him!" was the retort.

"Then, suppose I shoot you instead?"

She had turned her eyes in that direction, and the instant she made a move to turn her weapon she was seized.

For once Bess had let slip an advantage gained, and the man she had held helpless now had her in his strong grasp, and her struggles were soon useless.

The pistol had been wrested out of her hand almost immediately.

"There, plague on you!" cried the man, as he held her by the wrists. "Maybe you will try that wildcat game again!"

"Yes, at the first chance," cried Bess, almost ready to cry, indeed so great was her disappointment, to say nothing of her alarm for her noble and fearless detective lover.

Scorcher Sam was struggling his hardest, and for a time it looked as if he would overcome his adversaries, even though they were two to one against him.

In the struggle, however, he stumbled over the man he had already secured, and that worthy grabbed him by a leg with his manacled hands.

That decided the contest quickly, and Sam was thrown down and a pistol was pressed to his head.

It was then the detective was enabled to recognize two of his assailants.

These were one Reddy Keen, known as Reddy, the "Turk," and the prisoner of the previous night, Phil Bogle, the forger!

The other two were men he did not know.

Sam knew the building they were in, and recognized the fact that he was in a desperate strait, as the building was unoccupied.

But he did not feel so much alarm for himself as for his bonny Bess, as he was wont to call her on occasion.

"By Harry!" cried Bogle, "but this is glorious luck! We never thought you would walk into our hands like this.

Maybe I won't get square with you for last night!"

"It is your inning," said Sam, doggedly.

"And you bet we will make the most of it. Reddy here has got an iron in the fire for you."

"Yer kin bet yer head I have. And it is good 'n hot, too. See?"

"Well, whatever you intend doing to me, you can have nothing against this lady," said Sam.

"I admit that, but she has come here to keep an appointment with a friend of mine."

"And where is he?"

"Oh, he will be here all in good time, don't worry your head about him. You have got troubles enough of your own just now without shouldering anybody else's."

It was useless to argue or debate the matter, so Sam said no more. Bess had not yet lifted her veil, and he believed that she would be safer as Miss Whitledge than as Bicycle Bess the police decoy, as he was powerless to lift his hand in her defense.

There was a momentary pause, and while it lasted there came a signal at the door, and Bogle ordered it opened, and the handcuffed man stepped forward and obeyed. The man admitted was Elbridge Parmer, who, at sight of Scorcher Sam, gave a start of surprise.

CHAPTER XII.

BRAVO, BESSIE!

"Hello!" cried the newcomer. "What have we here?"

"We have got a big fish in the net this time, you bet," responded Bogle, with a laugh. "This is the chap that put the wristlets on me last night and thought he had me."

"The deuce you say! And he is the same fellow who interfered with my pudding last night, too."

"Then we have a good chance to get square with him."

"I should say so."

"And we must put him where the dogs will not bite him, too. It will never do for him to get out of here with what he knows now."

"No, you are right."

"But first see to your young woman there. We want no witnesses that we can't trust fully."

"That's right; you hold this fellow and I'll soon take her off out of the way. But, you needn't wait for me; go ahead and do what you please with him."

"All right, if that suits you."

Parmer advanced toward Bicycle Bess. "Oh, sir, what does all this mean?" she cried. "There must be some terrible mistake somewhere."

"There is no mistake about the fact that you are in my power, anyhow, my charming Estelle. You came to see one ardent lover, but you have found another."

"Sir! What do you mean?"

The voice was certainly not that of Estelle Whitledge.

Palmer looked the surprise he felt, and for a moment acted as if he did not know what move to make.

"Do you mean to say you are not Estelle Whitledge?" he demanded.

"Certainly I am not," cried Bess. "This is a gross outrage, and I demand my liberty instantly."

"Then who in blazes are you?"

He stepped forward and snatched the veil away from her face.

"Great Scott!" he cried, as a perfectly strange face greeted his sight, yet one no

whit less beautiful than that of Miss Whitledge.

"I hope you are satisfied," cried Bess, with great indignation.

"Who are you, how came you here?" cried the baffled villain and arch schemer.

"It need not matter who I am, I demand my liberty."

"But it does matter. You can't go till I know more about you. How came you here?"

"Well, if you are determined, I came here to find Mr. John Lineman, who I heard had met with an accident and had been sent to — Hospital. I hired a cabman to take me there, and he brought me here."

Elbridge Parmer tore around the great empty entrance-way of the big building like a madman. He saw that his well-laid scheme had miscarried, but he was far from guessing the truth.

"Where did you hire that cabman?" he demanded fiercely.

"In front of the house where Mr. Lineman lodges. Why he did not take me to my destination is more than I can understand."

Scorcher Sam was more than delighted to see what a clever little game his aide was playing.

Not that he dared hope she could win her object, or save his life, for, in the hands of Forger Bogle and his tools, he believed that he was doomed; but he did hope that her own life would be spared.

"Great blazes!" almost screamed Parmer. "Did you come there in a cab?"

"Yes, sir," said Bess.

"Where from?"

"From down town, sir."

"Then what did you want of another cab?"

"Why, I dismissed mine, sir. I thought to find Mr. Lineman at home."

"Furies! And how did you come to know anything about it, anyhow? I demand the whole story, or you are not likely to leave here in a hurry."

"Why, by calling at his lodging to see him, and there being told. But why all this questioning? Why are you detaining me here? Why am I not allowed to go on to the hospital to see him?"

"Prince of furies!" cried Parmer, almost tearing at his hair in his great passion. "To think that it should have turned out like this, and all by a mere chance! But, was it chance?"

He wheeled and confronted Scorcher Sam.

"By heavens, I believe you had a hand in this! If I was sure of it— But, I am sure of it."

"Yes, I had something to do with it, I admit. I was passing and saw this lady enter here, and knowing that the building was unoccupied, I leaped off my wheel and ran in to see what was going on, and I have found out."

"To your satisfaction?" sneered Bogle.

"Won't you please let me go?" cried Bess.

Parmer paced up and down, pulling at his mustache, and it was plain that he was in a dilemma and knew not what to do. And in that situation Bogle took a hand, and growled:

"No, you can't let her go. There is too much at stake just now."

"Yes, that's so," agreed Parmer.

"Oh! please let me go!" cried Bess.

"Do not detain me here, I beg of you, don't do it!"

"Shut up and listen to me," ordered Parmer. "There has been a mistake made, and you have gotten yourself into

this fix by an awkward turn of the wheel of fortune. We dare not let you go, for you would tell what you have seen here and—"

"But would you not believe me if I told you that I would not tell? I must go. I must!"

"But we wouldn't dare to trust you. I promise you that no harm shall come to you, though, if you do just as we tell you to do."

"Tell me; I will do anything, if you will only let me go."

She was wringing her hands, having been released, though her captor was standing near her so that she could not get away.

"You will have to remain here till evening," said Parmer. "Then we will let you go on condition that you tell no one where you have been. There is a room on the next floor you can occupy."

Bess covered her face with her hands and her form shook as if with sobbing, and she did not act much like the girl who had so spunkily handled a revolver so short a time before.

"That is the best you can do, I guess," said Bogle.

"Yes, I see no other way."

"Mighty curious how such a mistake was made," added Bogle.

"There was no mistake," declared Parmer. "That is, so far as our man was concerned. Chance made this young woman fill the bill, that is all."

"And where can the other be?"

"May have come to the house five minutes after the cab left, and is now hustling around to find the fellow at the hospital. A confounded piece of rotten luck!"

"Well, better say no more about it."

"That's so. Take her up to that room, Bob, and lock the door on her."

Bess had given Sam a look to reassure him that she would try to make her sojourn in that room as short as possible, and now she was led sobbing away.

"And now for this fellow," said Bogle.

"Yes, now for him, and he won't fare so well, he can bet."

"Bet yer life on that," cried Reddy the "Turk." "What is goin' to be done with him, boss?"

"He has got to be done for, no other way."

"I guess you are right."

"He has got only himself to blame for it. He did his best to land me, and now I am going to land him."

"What is the plan?"

"Any way you please, so long as it is a sure one."

"What if we let Reddy fling him down the death-trap?"

"What good would that do? The fall would not kill him—"

The "Turk" nodded his head emphatically, and Parmer and Bogle looked at each other. As for Scorch Sam, he saw that it was a chance for his life, even though only one in a thousand.

CHAPTER XIII.

HERE IS A HEROINE.

"I guess that will do all right," said Parmer, "and no one of us will be alone responsible then."

"And no use wasting any time about it, eitner," said Bogle. "Get him ready, Turk, while we hold him for you."

"So you don't mean to give me a chance for my life?" said Scorch Sam.

"Nary a chance, confound you!"

"But it is hardly fair to take a fellow off so sudden. I would at least like to drop a fair farewell line to my old mother."

"Yes, no doubt you would, but you can't. Gag him, Turk, while you are about it, for we don't want him making any noise, in case the drop don't break his neck."

"That's right."

"How much of a fall is it?"

"Twenty feet or more, from this floor to the sub-cellar bottom."

"That will do the business for him all right. Never a fear that he will trouble us any more."

"And he will be bones before he is found."

No time was lost.

The "Turk" performed well his work.

In a few minutes Scorch Sam had been securely bound and gagged, and all was ready.

The shaft of a freight elevator was not far away, and to that Sam was carried by the "Turk" and Bogle, and was laid on the floor while they looked down into the death-trap.

They could not see the bottom, for it was as dark as midnight down there.

"That will do all right," said the "Turk."

"Yes, it will do. Lend a hand, Reddy."

The "Turk" caught hold, and together they held Scorch Sam over the dark pit, head downward.

Sam made a brief mental prayer, and the next instant he shot downward into the dismal depths.

There was a thud below, and no other sound came to the ears of the murderers, though they listened for some moments, and at last Bogle offered the remark:

"Well, that is off our hands, and we have one detective the less to watch out for."

"Yes," said Parmer, "and now I have got to go and see what has become of that girl."

"She is all right," said the fellow Bob, who had taken Bess away at Parmer's order.

"No, I mean the other, the one I didn't get."

"Oh!"

"You locked the door on this one?"

"You bet."

"Then she is safe and all right. We'll have you let her go about an hour after dark, and then we will be out of here and away."

"No way of her getting out, is there?" asked Bogle.

"Oh, no, she is all right. Well, I am going, and if you hear a yaup out of her, go up and make her keep still."

So saying Parmer opened the door and passed out.

It was immediately fastened after him, and he ran down the steps to the street.

Scorch Sam's wheel was standing there, and a policeman was looking at it.

He looked up as Parmer came down the steps.

"Know anything about this wheel?" he inquired.

"I know that it is mine," replied Parmer.

Mounting Scorch Sam's wheel, he rode off, while the policeman went on his way swinging his club in blissful ignorance of the situation.

But the man had not ridden far when there was a shout.

"Hi! there! come back with that bike!"

It was raised by two boys whom the policeman had driven away from the machine a little while before.

Parmer looked at them, and gnashed his teeth in rage as he did so. He increased his speed, at the same time calling out of them.

"I guess not, when it happens to be my own wheel," he answered.

"Ye lie!" they shouted. "You ain't the gent what left it there, you ain't!"

"If I had hold of you I would wring your necks for you," Parmer grated between shut teeth. "Out of my way!"

The boys had run along after him, but now he was speeding so that they were soon distanced, and they turned and began to yell to the policeman.

"Hi! cop! there goes a feller what's snivvied a bike!"

They ran back toward the policeman while shouting, but before they met him the thief had turned a corner and was out of sight.

"What's that ye say?" the policeman demanded.

"That feller's stole a bike."

"No, I guess not; he said it was his."

"We guess nit! He ain't the chap what left it there."

"Is that so?"

"Course it's so; think we'd lie about it? But it ain't a bit of use chasin' him now."

"Then whose wheel was it?" demanded the policeman, interested.

"Don't know, but et was a feller wot had on a reg'lar bike suit, and he was a nobby looker, too."

"Well, where is he?"

"Don't know. We seen him ride along, and the next time we looked his wheel was standin' there."

"Then it's plain that it can't be the same wheel," said the policeman, decisively.

But the two boys were sure of their point and shook their heads knowingly as they sauntered back to the spot where they had been playing before it happened, at the end of an alley that ran between the large building and a warehouse.

Leaving them, let us return to Bicycle Bess.

She played well her role until the door had been closed and locked upon her.

Then she was upon her feet instantly, and, with clinched fists, she looked around her prison to find a speedy means of escape, for escape she must.

There were the windows, and she ran to them. They were of heavy glass, and were securely fastened down. Besides, they opened upon a darksome alley, and promised no means of escape.

Nevertheless, the man had no sooner gone below than she picked up a leg of a broken table the room contained and broke one of the huge panes at a single blow, taking the chances of being heard, knowing that the door of the room was thick and heavy.

Out went the glass with a crash and jingled down into the alley, and Bess leaned out and looked down. It was not a great height from the ground, but too far to think of dropping.

Under the window was a ledge, perhaps ten inches wide, running from one end of the building to the other.

Could she walk it to the street? Would she dare try it?

With the table leg she battered out the remaining splinters of the glass, using her skirt on the end of the weapon to deaden the sound, and in a little time the worst of them had been removed.

There was ample room for her to step out.

It was a dangerous proceeding, but she did not hesitate, knowing what was at stake.

Keeping a tight hold on the sash of the window, she got safely out, and that done, she turned and placed her back to the outer wall, her hands at her sides, and palms against the wall.

She could stand there all right, and

As soon as she had become a little accustomed to the strangeness of it, she began to move sidewise toward the street end of the alley, slowly but surely, inch by inch, her eyes fixed upon the opposite wall.

It was nerve-trying, but Bessie Blake had plenty of nerve, and it had been well tested on other occasions.

Finally, after what had seemed to her an age, she came to the end of the coping.

She could look down into the street, but there was no way by which she could possibly get down, that she could see.

Where the coping ended was an abrupt rise of about eighteen inches, where the front ornamental work joined it, and leaning her hand on that, Bess slowly bent her body and looked over and down. Two boys were playing just beneath on the sidewalk.

"Boys!" she called.

They instantly stopped their pastime and looked up, and what they saw gave them a start.

"Gee whiz!" one exclaimed. "You will fall if you don't look out!"

"No, I won't, but I want help to get down from here just as quickly as possible. Can you bring it?"

"Shall we call out the hook and ladder brigade? Don't know of no other way?"

"Is there an engine house near by?"

"Bout a block away."

"Then run there in all haste and tell them of the fix I am in."

"All right. But here comes a cop; mebbe he can do somethin' to get ye down, ma'am."

"Tell him I am here, but don't you stop to talk to him. Go to the engine house as fast as your legs can carry you."

"All right, you bet."

"And I will reward you when I do get down."

They were off like a shot, and in another minute a policeman came hurrying along.

He was looking up as he came, the boys having told him, and when he saw the young woman standing in that dangerous position he fairly gasped.

"How on earth came you there?" he demanded.

"I was imprisoned in the building and have just got out," said Bess. "There is a murder being done in there, and you must go for help immediately; do not mind me, but get a gait on quick!"

"A murder, you say?"

"Yes, yes, yes. Scorcher Sam, of the Bike Squad, is there in the power of Bogle the forger. Get help and post men at every exit, and then raid the building and you will get him. Big feather for you, if you are lively."

CHAPTER XIV.

OUT OF THE JAWS.

Bicycle Bess had to tell the policeman who she was, and answer many more questions, before she could prevail upon the officer to start.

Quite a knot of people had by this time gathered, and some were beginning to call out to know what she was doing there.

Fortunately, the main entrance of the building was on the other street, or they might have apprised the rascals by their presence that everything was not right.

Bess had by this time become somewhat accustomed to her novel position, and in order to escape the gaze of the crowd she retreated the way she had come along the ledge, and was able to do so at much greater speed, and she was soon out of their range of vision.

There she remained until presently she saw the end of a ladder touch the front coping, and in another minute a fireman's head appeared there.

She soon reached the fireman, who held out a hand to her, and she was soon safely on the ladder.

"What in creation were you doing there?" he asked her. "How came you out there on that ledge? What is the meaning of it, anyhow? And who are you?"

"Never mind now," said Bess. "Are the police coming yet?"

"The police?"

"Yes."

"I didn't see any."

"Then you must lend your aid till they come. Listen, and I will tell you what is wanted."

This she quickly did, and the fireman, a bright young fellow, was prompt to grasp the situation.

Some men had come with him, and he quickly stationed them at each end of the alley, himself and another going to the coping from which Bess had just escaped.

It was a relief to Bess when she saw a squad of police hurrying to the scene.

As it happened, the sergeant in charge was a man whom she knew.

"What the deuce is this I am told, Miss Blake?" he asked, as soon as he came up.

Briefly and straight to the point Bess told him, and it took him but a few minutes to station his men so that it would be next to impossible for any one to get out of the building and escape.

That done, he and Bess and three men besides advanced to the front door.

Bess had another trick to play, if it would work.

She had meantime whispered it to the sergeant, and he and his men stood just out of sight while she rapped at the door.

Her veil was down, and when she had rapped several times she caught the glimpse of a face behind the stained glass as it appeared there for a moment while its possessor peered out.

Seeing that it was only a woman, the man came close to the glass.

"Who is there?" was demanded.

"Is this the — Hospital?" asked Bess.

There was immediately some exchange of remarks within.

Then the answer: "Yes, this is the place, but who are you and what do you want?"

"I want to see Mr. John Lineman, if he is here."

The door was immediately opened on a crack, and the same person in the blue coat appeared.

"Have you got a pass?" he asked, in a polite tone.

"Yes," answered Bess, at the same time giving a sign to the sergeant and his men that the door had been opened, "and here it is!"

And there it was, true enough—in the shape of the burly police sergeant's shoulder, and the door went open wide with a crash and he and his men rushed in.

One of the men stopped short in the door, with drawn revolver in his grasp.

Bess had been the first to enter.

With mad curses, the rascals had turned to run, but the sonorous voice of the sergeant commanded them to halt.

"Stop! or I shoot!" he thundered again.

With an oath, Phil Bogle turned, his hand flying to his hip pocket at the same time.

"Don't you try it!" warned the sergeant. "If you do, your light will go out so quick you will never know what struck you!"

Bogle hesitated, and by that time the other officers had his pal safely captured.

But they had yet to hear from Reddy the "Turk."

Bicycle Bess had not been idle, though, for no sooner had the one fellow been captured than she went for his pistol and secured it, and not only his, but her own as well.

About that time heavy steps were heard, and the "Turk" came tearing down the stairs three at a time, shouting:

"Deuce is to pay! The gal is gone, and the police and firemen are up there layin' for us—"

And then he came to a dead stop as he saw what was taking place.

An oath escaped him, and he reached for a weapon.

"If you do it you are a dead man!"

The voice was that of Bicycle Bess, and she confronted him with the big pistol of the captured man in her right hand and her own smaller one in her left.

Her veil had now been thrown back out of the way, and with flushed face and flashing eyes she made a pretty but terrible picture for the "Turk" to gaze upon.

He took her hint and did not draw the pistol, as he had intended.

And in another moment one of the policemen had a revolver at his head, and he succumbed to the inevitable.

While this was going on, the sergeant was advancing upon Bogle the forger with his revolver pointed straight at his head, and the forger was watching him with sharp interest.

He was watching for half a chance to dodge, draw his own weapon and shoot. And presently he tried it.

Dropping suddenly, he whipped out his pistol and fired a snap-shot.

It missed, and the sergeant had already fired his own revolver as the man had dodged, he, too, missing.

Bogle was on the point of shooting again, when there came a shot from further back in the hall, and his arm dropped to his side and he rolled over with a howl of pain.

The shot had been fired by Bess.

And the man was no sooner down than she ran forward to him and clapped both her weapons to his head.

"Tell me where he is!" she cried. "What have you done with him? If you do not answer in five seconds I will blow out your wicked brains!"

There was no mistaking that threat!

"Quick!" she cried, pressing hard with her weapons.

"Down—down the shaft—there—"

So the man made haste to gasp, for now the knee of the sergeant was upon his chest.

"You wretch!" cried Bess. "If he is dead, you will never live to see the inside of a station, I warn you! Quick, officers! we must rescue Scorcher Sam!"

The prisoners having been overcome, they were speedily disarmed and handcuffed, and one man stood guard over them.

Bess had run to the shaft and was peering down, but could see nothing.

"Sam!" she called in anguish. "Sam!"

There was no response, but she thought she did detect a slight moan.

A rope was within her reach, and getting hold of it, she tried it to see if it was secure.

Finding that it was, she swung out

lightly over the black pit and let herself down hand under hand, fearlessly, and in a few moments was at the bottom.

There was something soft under her feet, and she soon found that the sweepings of the building had been cast down there and that there was a great bed of paper and packing.

She had matches, and struck one, taking care not to let it drop into the papers, and there on the heap lay Sam!

His head was half buried and he was partly on his knees.

Grabbing him by the back of his collar, she pulled with all her might and succeeded in rolling him over.

His hands tied behind his back, he had been in such a position as to be entirely unable to help himself, and he was nearly suffocated when she rescued him.

Putting out the match, Bess got her knife and carefully cut the cords that bound him and removed the gag from his mouth.

"My darling! my brave, bonny Bess!"

"Thank God, Sam!"

She embraced him, there in the dark, and a voice called down from above to know if he had been found.

"Yes, he is alive, sergeant!" Bess answered, "and I guess he has no broken bones. He will be able to speak for himself as soon as he gets his breath and gets the kink out of his back."

"I'll be all right in a couple of minutes, Bess," Sam now assured. "But I thought in that death-trap my time had surely come. How did you get out of their hands so promptly? But, no, not now; that will keep, and it will be all the sweeter when we can talk it over at leisure."

CHAPTER XV.

CONCLUSION.

Bess and Sam were speedily helped out of the shaft, and when once they stepped upon the solid floor above they were heartily congratulated.

The Scorchers advanced to where Phil Bogle stood, and said:

"Well, you see the tables have been turned again, and this time it looks as if you are in it to stay."

"No thanks to you," growled Bogle.

"No, you are right," agreed Sam, "but all thanks and praise to my brave little ally here, who was too keen for even such a sharper as you. She did you up brown."

"And look out that I don't do both of you up brown one of these days," was the fierce retort.

"We'll have to take chances of that."

As there was still further work to be done, Sam left the prisoners in charge of the sergeant and his men, and he and Bess paused to consult and brush themselves up a little.

While they were doing this a policeman came up to Sam.

"You had a wheel, hadn't you?" he asked.

"Sure," said Sam. "Have you seen anything of it?"

The officer told what he knew, and Sam knew who had taken his "bike."

"Now, Bess, we must capture him," he decided. "And I believe that he will be found at that place where you saw him last night."

"You think so?"

"Yes, there can be no doubt but he is the man who sent Wood Collier and Ben Hess to dispose of John Lineman, but he had no idea that John was going out to Podunkville."

"That must be it, and that's how he is so puzzled all around."

"I'll go there and see about his case." "And where you go, there I'll go, too," answered Bess, playfully.

In less than an hour, disguised as a Pole and wife—or daughter—Sam and Bess entered the saloon.

Sam's wheel was there.

Sam pretended that he could not talk English, but he handed over some money and motioned that they wanted something to eat, and they sat down at a table.

At an adjoining table was Parmer, eating, for the saloon was also a cheap restaurant—one of the recently popular "hotels," and with him another man, to whom he was talking.

"No, and it beats the mischief," Parmer was saying. "I have not heard a word from Wood or Ben, and now I am waiting for an answer to a message I sent to the old codger out at Podunkville an hour ago. When that comes, I may have more light."

At that moment a messenger came in and inquired for Elbridge Parmer, and the message was delivered.

As soon as he read it Parmer leaped to his feet.

"Blazes!" he cried. "The girl is safe at home, but some one else came in her stead. Lineman was assaulted there last night, and is at home in a critical condition. I am defied, and the old fool contemplates suicide, if I understand the hint he gives. By Harry, but he shall not do that if I can prevent; I will have that girl—"

"And right here she is!"

So said the pretending Polish woman, as she rose from her table and confronted the rascal.

It was not Estelle, but it was her impersonator, and as she spoke she leveled her revolver at Parmer and bade him throw his hands up over his head, which he did.

At the same time Sam had seized his companion and had snapped a handcuff upon one of his wrists, and with deftness he put the other half of it on a wrist of Elbridge Parmer, and so the remainder of the miserable clique was in limbo at last.

Sam and Bess saw them safe behind bars, and then donning wheel attire, they took a run out to Podunkville, arriving at the Whitledge residence late in the day. There was excitement about the place, and they soon learned that Whitledge had indeed taken his life!

He had discovered somehow that Estelle was at home, and a stormy interview had followed. Then had come a telegram, which he answered, and shortly after that a pistol shot was heard in his room. As Estelle's guardian, he had dipped heavily into her fortune and had put himself in the power of Parmer. The latter, eager to cheat Lineman of Estelle, and win her for himself, had promised to put the old man on his feet if he would aid him to attain that end.

It was shown that Parmer was a confederate of Bogle's, and that they were, at the time of their arrest, getting ready for a most daring piece of forgery; but it had been nipped in the bud, thanks to the efforts of Scorchers Sam and nery Bicycle Bess.

Needless to say, in conclusion, all of the rascals in this case got their just deserts.

THE END.

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